

Cholesterol Check

OSF HealthCare Newsroom

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PRINT SCRIPT

Obesity early in life can lead to life-long physical and mental health challenges, according to a study in *Journal Pediatrics*.

This comes as childhood obesity has more than tripled since the 1970s, due to unhealthy eating and low amounts of physical activity, says the World Health Organization (WHO). This increase should also serve as a reminder for parents to get their children's cholesterol checked. The CDC recommends children and adolescents should have their cholesterol checked at least once between ages nine and 11 and again between ages 17 and 21.

What is Cholesterol?

"Cholesterol is one of the molecules that, in limited quantities, is essential for the human body to make cells," says Frank Han, MD, a pediatric cardiologist with OSF HealthCare. "In larger quantities it has the potential to increase the future risk of heart artery disease or coronary artery disease in kids and future adults."

Healthy cholesterol vs. unhealthy cholesterol

"There is some influence on your cholesterol numbers from what you eat," Dr. Han says. "The general idea of what's healthy cholesterol and what's bad cholesterol is: HDL is considered the healthy cholesterol and LDL is considered the unhealthy or bad cholesterol. The general idea that people can take home is to have a heart-healthy diet."

A few things a heart-healthy diet consists of eating a variety of fruits and vegetables every day. Choose foods with mostly whole grains rather than refined grains. Cut back on high fat and processed foods and eat more foods you prepared yourself, and foods containing healthier fats. [You can read more about maintaining a heart-healthy diet here.](#)

The United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) releases cholesterol guidelines for preventive care. The most recent results were released in July 2023, and 2016 before that.

"They commented on how they need more research to determine if routine cholesterol screenings for kids derive benefits in the long-term," Dr. Han says.

Guidance from the USPSTF has suggested cholesterol screenings are beneficial for kids who have other medical conditions like family-inherited high cholesterol, Dr. Han says.

When is it time to see a cardiologist about your cholesterol?

Dr. Han says kids are referred to cardiologists by their primary care provider.

“When we have those patients in our office, we’ll make sure they’re well-informed about what a healthy diet and exercise looks like,” Dr. Han says. “Then, should the child need it, with or without the assistance of our colleagues in the Healthy Kids University office, or a dietitian, we can work on improving their lifestyle habits.”

Along with maintaining a heart-healthy diet, Dr. Han recommends kids make physical activity a daily habit with an activity they enjoy.